



Just the Facts...

Oral Fitness During Deployment Wisdom Teeth

Why is oral fitness important?

Today's Soldiers need to stay physically fit and healthy in order to support their unit's preparations and deploy rapidly to any region of the globe. Combat-ready Soldiers need healthy mouths for:

1. Communication (speaking, smiling, or whistling). The teeth work with the lips and tongue to make the sounds that we use for talking.
2. Energy intake (tasting, chewing, and swallowing). A healthy, high-fiber diet requires chewing. Your body can get more vitamins and nutrients from food after it has been chewed.

Oral diseases interfere with these functions, and can cause severe, life-threatening illness. Every time a Soldier has to be transported out of the area of operations for dental treatment, they expose themselves and their fellow Soldiers to attacks from insurgents. Soldiers who do not take care of their mouths could put their buddies in the line of fire.

There are three major causes of dental casualties during training and deployments:

- Painful or infected wisdom teeth
- Periodontal disease (gum disease)
- Dental caries (tooth decay)

Why do we have wisdom teeth?

Wisdom teeth, also called third molars, come in last, usually between the ages of 17 and 25. Wisdom teeth are just as useful and valuable as other back teeth if they come in straight, and the gum heals around them.

What causes wisdom tooth problems?

If there is not enough room in the jaw for a wisdom tooth, it can become trapped part way beneath the gums. Wisdom teeth are often tipped sideways, and can not come in all the way. Tipped or partially covered wisdom teeth are called impacted. They are hard to clean. The area around the tooth traps food and plaque. Bacteria or germs grow in the plaque and cause the tooth to become decayed, or cause the gums around the tooth to become swollen and infected. They can cause the tooth next to them to become decayed or develop gum disease, also.



The gums over this erupting wisdom tooth are swollen and painful



This erupting wisdom tooth has become infected

Unfortunately, many Soldiers stop cleaning their mouths every day during deployment. Many also use harmful oral habits, such as tobacco use and excessive consumption of sugary drinks or snacks, to stay alert or deal with the stress of deployment. Soldiers who do not take care of their mouths during deployment can develop severe wisdom tooth problems that require medical evacuation and emergency surgery.

Wisdom teeth that do not come in at all can cause serious problems also. The sac around the developing tooth can turn into a tumor that expands and destroys the nearby bones and teeth.

What are the symptoms of wisdom teeth problems?

As with all oral diseases, wisdom tooth problems are like ticking time bombs. You usually cannot tell that you have a problem until it causes:

- Crowding of the other teeth
- Inability to sleep
- Pain
- Difficulty eating
- Swelling of the gums, mouth, face or neck

Wisdom teeth that do not come in at all often do not cause any symptoms, even when they develop tumors or other problems. Unerupted wisdom teeth should be x-rayed every few years and watched carefully for problems.



How can you prevent wisdom tooth problems?

When wisdom teeth are erupting and the gums are sore, rinse with salt water several times a day to keep the area clean and aid healing. Mix 1/2 tsp. of salt with 8 oz. of warm water.

Avoid becoming a dental casualty by attaining Dental Class 1 (no dental treatment needed) before you deploy. Have a dental exam and a cleaning every year to detect and treat wisdom tooth problems as soon as possible. If the dentist decides that your wisdom teeth need to come out, have them taken out as soon as possible. Younger people recover from surgery more quickly and have fewer complications.

The most common complication following wisdom tooth extraction is a “dry socket”. This happens when the blood clot that has formed in the extraction site falls out and exposes the bone. The condition is painful and slows down healing. Dry socket can be caused by smoking, high estrogen levels, and poor oral health care habits. To prevent dry socket:

- Stop smoking for at least 24 hours before and after wisdom teeth extractions.
- Females taking oral contraceptives should schedule extractions during days 23 to 28 of their cycle.
- Avoid drinking soda (carbonated beverages), spitting, sucking on a straw for several days.
- Avoid eating foods that can remain in the mouth such as popcorn, peanuts and pasta for several days. Eating soft foods such as mashed potatoes, clear soup and pudding helps ensure food particles do not interfere with the normal formation and healing of the blood clots.
- Swish gently with salt water after meals to keep the mouth free of excess bacteria.

If your wisdom teeth come in straight, and you can keep them clean, you can keep them your whole life. Protect them by using Combat Stress Control techniques to deal with the stress of deployment, instead of harmful oral habits. Just like a good motor sergeant uses a PMCS schedule (preventive maintenance, checks and services) to keep his/her vehicles running, you need to PMCS your mouth every day during deployment to stay fit and healthy!



This wisdom tooth did not come in, and made a large cyst that hollowed out the surrounding jawbone

DAILY	
Clean Your Mouth	Watch What You Put In Your Mouth
Floss daily to clean between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach	Avoid or cut back on tobacco. Smokeless tobacco wears away your gums and increases your risk of tooth decay and gum disease. It causes white leathery patches that can turn into oral cancer. Smoking can cause gum disease, bone loss, tooth loss, and oral cancer.
Brush after meals or before sleeping to remove food debris, plaque buildup and bacteria. Use a toothbrush with a small head that fits around the back teeth and can clean everywhere.	Eat healthy foods from the 5 major food groups. Your mouth needs nutrients such as vitamins A, C, D, E, B2, Niacin, B6, B12, Folic Acid, and minerals such as Zinc, Iron, and Calcium to repair the lining of your mouth, maintain your gums, and prevent bone loss around your teeth.
Use fluoride toothpaste and a gentle, circular motion for 2 minutes	Limit drinks that are sweetened with decay-causing sugars (fructose, glucose or sucrose and high fructose corn syrup). They include sports drinks, energy drinks, sodas, and punch.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No toothpaste? Brush anyway	Limit sugary, sticky, or starchy between-meal snacks
Don't rinse, eat or drink for 30 minutes afterwards to allow the toothpaste to protect your teeth	Eat tooth-friendly snack foods that protect or improve your oral health such as:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No toothbrush?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swish with water after eating• Wipe teeth with a clean cloth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nuts, fruit, raw vegetables, plain yogurt, or cheddar cheese (hardens tooth surface) do not promote decay-causing bacteria
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black tea contains fluoride
Toothbrush, toothpaste, and dental floss are available in the Health and Comfort Pack (HCP), Type I (NSN 8970-01-368-9154)	Use gum or mints that contain xylitol as the first ingredient, for about 5 minutes after eating meals or snacks. Xylitol is a natural sweetener that blocks bacteria from turning starchy/sugary foods into acids that cause dental caries. Xylitol gum can be found in the accessory pack of the MRE.